



## **Profile and Predictors of Voluntary Civic Engagement at a Private University in Egypt**

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### Abstract

This study explored the characteristics and predictors of university student voluntary civic engagement. It was conducted at a private university in Egypt, a developing country where student volunteerism has the potential to significantly impact community development efforts. A total of 518 students responded to the study. Consistent with previous literature, students who chose to participate in community service clubs were more likely to be female and religious. They moreover reported greater commitment to civic service as well as pride and commitment to the university. Results suggested that volunteers fit an “Egyptianized” profile with characteristics including: Egyptian nationality, Muslim religion, attending a high-school located in a less privileged rural governorate, graduating from an Egyptian public school system, being more religious, and speaking more Arabic than English socially. Levels of depression did not differ between volunteers and non-volunteers; however, volunteers reported higher anxiety. Suggestions for future research are offered and findings are discussed in terms of their significance for community practice nationally, regionally and globally.

**Keywords:** civic engagement; community service; civic service; Egypt; university

### Introduction

Persuading youth to engage in activities that allow them to give back to the community is a global mission shared by numerous schools, universities, youth centers, religious centers, community programs and community organizations. Youth should be targeted by such institutions because they are much more likely to volunteer their efforts to help the community. For example, in the U.S. the growth rate of college student volunteers has more than doubled the rate of adult volunteers (Dote, Cramer, Dietz, & Grimm, 2006). Moreover, research has shown the positive impacts of youth civic engagement on the community and discovered the individual advantages they obtain through their involvement. Overall benefits to communities and larger society include fostering positive relationships between youth and community residents and cultivating a new generation of engaged and active citizens (Mohamed & Wheeler, 2001).

Community practitioners and organizations can directly benefit from youth engagement by expanding services beyond the capacity that paid staff can deliver, enhancing their visibility in the community, and forming new partnerships with other local organizations and institutions (Naughton, 2000; Urban Institute, 2004). In Egypt, where the present study was conducted, 62% of the overall population is 29 years of age and younger, yet only 2.3% of youth engage in volunteerism (Population Council, 2011). Given the current socio-economic stressors in Egypt and alarming poverty rates, student volunteerism in community practice can play a pivotal role for future reform, community development, and social change. Therefore, it is important to examine the predictors and characteristics of students who have independently

sought out volunteering opportunities so that community organizations and academic institutions can develop strategies to attract and engage more youth in community service.

There are three main terms in the literature that are related to different types of student civic engagement. The term “community service” generally refers to voluntary or mandatory activities in service to a community that are not based on an academic curriculum. This is contrary to “service learning” which entails that service activities follow a curriculum or specific learning objectives in an academic setting (see National Commission on Service-learning, 2002 for further discussion of this topic). “Civic engagement” on the other hand is a more comprehensive term that may include political participation, religious participation, volunteerism, philanthropy, recreational and cultural group participation (Rose, 2006). For the purpose of this paper we will use the terms civic engagement, volunteerism and community service to refer to student initiated volunteer work, namely students engaging in community work through community service clubs on campus and/or through non-profit organizations in the region.

The majority of previous research has focused on formal service learning opportunities, whereas research on student voluntary community service has been less common. Some studies did not distinguish between the two types of engagement, and so whether or not the service in question was voluntary or a requirement (i.e. for a course/academic credit) was not always clear. Despite the limited literature, some studies have begun to document the characteristics and predictors of students who choose to volunteer in community service, as well as the correlates of this community service.

In these studies it was found that university students are more likely to volunteer if they are female (Astin & Sax 1998; Cruce & Moore, 2007; Dote et al., 2006; Fitch, 1991; Marks & Jones, 2004; Serow & Dreyden, 1990), have a higher socio-economic status (Marks & Jones, 2004; Serow & Dreyden, 1990), but are less materialistic (Astin & Sax, 1998; Marks & Jones, 2004; Serow & Dreyden, 1990), receive higher grades in college (Serow & Dreyden, 1990), are members of college organizations that encourage community service (e.g. Student Union and religious groups; Marks & Jones, 2004; Serow & Dreyden, 1990), and are unemployed (Fitch, 1991) or work fewer hours a week (Marks & Jones, 2004). Other important factors predictive of volunteerism include previous high-school community service (Astin & Sax, 1998; Astin, Sax, & Avalos, 1999; Berger & Milem, 2002; Marks & Jones, 2004), higher religiosity (Astin & Sax, 1998; Fitch, 1991; Marks & Jones, 2004; Serow & Dreyden, 1990), and a sense of responsibility for their community (Hellman, Hoppes, & Ellison, 2006). Almost all of these studies were conducted in the U.S. However, a study conducted at a university in Jordan, an Arabic-speaking country located in the Middle East, also found that women were more likely to volunteer, with 92.7% of participants volunteering for religious reasons (Al Gharaibeh, 2010).

Research on the outcomes of voluntary community service and service-learning has confirmed that a multitude of positive psychological factors and educational achievements are associated with service. In a critical review, Yates and Youniss (1996) found that civically engaged youth are more empowered and have a higher sense of personal competency than youth not involved in the community. Other positive outcomes of community service include improved academic performance (Primavera, 1999; Serow & Dreyden, 1990), increased critical thinking skills (Eyler, Root, & Giles, 1998), a greater sense of civic responsibility (Astin & Sax, 1998; Primavera, 1999), and positive self esteem and self concept (Astin & Sax, 1998; Hitlin, 2007; Primavera, 1999). Although these variables have been conceptualized as outcomes subsequent to the service activities, there may be a bidirectional relationship for some. For example, civic responsibility, previous academic achievement, and setting high academic goals may also predict future volunteerism among university students (Cruce & Moore, 2007; Marks & Jones, 2004).

Scholars have moreover found that volunteerism positively impacts a person's psychological well-being. Most research concerning the effects of volunteering on psychological well-being has focused on older

volunteers. This is most likely due to the substitution of community service for work in retired elders. In general, volunteerism in older adults has been associated with lower levels of depression (Hunter & Linn, 1980; Kim & Pai, 2010; Lum & Lightfoot, 2005; Morrow-Howell, Hinterlong, Rozario, & Tang, 2003; Musick & Wilson, 2003; Piliavin & Siegel, 2007; Wheeler, Gorey, & Greenblatt, 1998) and anxiety (Hunter & Linn, 1980). Using a sample of individuals aged 25 or older, with an over-representation of those over 60, Thoits and Hewitt (2001) found that volunteering in the community significantly improved six aspects of well-being: happiness, life satisfaction, self-esteem, sense of control over life, physical health, and depression. Another study found that a decline in depression level was seen in volunteers above 65 but volunteerism did not affect trajectories of depression in younger or middle-aged volunteers (Kim & Pai, 2010). As most research has been with older adults, further research is needed to explore whether the beneficial effects of volunteering on psychological well-being are found with university students.

The fundamental aims of the present research were fourfold. The first was to determine the characteristics and predictors of volunteering at a private university in order to gain a deeper understanding of civic engagement in this context and discuss how results may be applied to community practice in Egypt and the Middle East. Our study offered data from a different cultural context when compared to the aforementioned studies, the majority of which were carried out in the West, predominately in the United States. The second aim of the study was to examine the extent to which attachment to the local community (e.g., having extended in-state residence and ethnic/national/socio-cultural ties) was associated with greater commitment to civic engagement. As such, this study sought to explore how greater attachment to the Egyptian community (e.g., Egyptian citizenship, Muslim faith, high religiosity, studying in the Egyptian educational system, speaking more Arabic than English) may be related to voluntary community service. A third, related, aim was to look at attachment on a smaller scale, namely loyalty, pride, and sense of affiliation to the university. It was expected that students who demonstrated greater attachment to Egyptian society and to the university would be more likely to volunteer as this could be indicative of a stronger bond and sense of responsibility for their local community. These factors go beyond the personal predictors explored in previous literature to consider issues related to sense of community. The final aim was to explore the relationship between voluntary community service and psychological well-being, specifically depression,

anxiety and stress. This final aim sought to determine if results found for older adults would also be applicable to university youth.

**Method**

**Participants**

Data was collected from 518 students enrolled at a private four-year liberal arts university in Cairo, Egypt. The sample contained students across university class levels including first year (12.5%), second year (18.1%), third year (23.7%), fourth and fifth year (24.5%), and graduate students (21.2%). The majority of the participants were women (67.6%), with the Egyptian nationality (69.2%), and of Muslim faith (75.8%). The mean age of total participants was 21.81 (SD = 5.65). Our study focuses mostly on 19.1% (n = 99) of these 518 participants who were identified as being civically engaged, as defined by their involvement in voluntary, on-campus community service clubs. More details about the population as well as a comparison of civically engaged versus non-engaged participant characteristics can be found in Table 1.

**Instruments and Assessment Items**

**Socio-demographics and academic background.**

Socio-demographic and academic variables included gender, age, nationality, religion, high-school location, type of high-school diploma, language spoken while socializing (amount of Arabic versus English) and current grade point average (G.P.A.) on a 4-point scale. Religiosity was measured by a single item asking participants to rate how religious they were on a scale from 1 to 10. This type of single-item scale has shown good reliability and validity for Arab samples, including significant correlations with full-length religiosity scales (Abdel-Khalek, 2007).

The high-school location item had four choices: 1) Greater Cairo, 2) Alexandria, 3) Another governorate in Egypt and 4) Another country. Type of high-school diploma included seven choices: American high-school diploma, Egyptian public education system ("Thanaweya Amma"), French Baccalaureate, German Abitur, IGCSE/GCSE/GCE (British educational system) and International Baccalaureate. Overall GPA was left open-ended.

The language spoken while socializing item asked "What language do you *mostly* use while socializing?" and gave participants four options: 1) Arabic, 2) English, 3) Both Arabic and English *equally* and 4) Other. English is a second language in Egypt and is spoken with variable fluency among most school-educated Egyptians. This question is important because it can be a very good indicator of type and/or quality of

education, and, as a result, socio-economic status within Egyptian society.

**Table 1. Characteristics of Civically Engaged and Non Engaged**

| Socio-demographics                                 | % Civically Engaged (n = 99) | % Non Civically Engaged (n = 419) | % Total Participants (n = 518) |
|--|------------------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Total Participants                                 | 19.1                         | 80.9                              |                                |
| <b>Gender</b>                                      |                              |                                   |                                |
| Female   | 78.8                         | 65.0                              | 67.6                           |
| Male   | 21.2                         | 35.0                              | 32.4                           |
| <b>Nationality</b>                                 |                              |                                   |                                |
| Egyptian   | 84.2                         | 65.7                              | 69.2                           |
| Egyptian – dual or triple nationality <sup>a</sup> | 7.4                          | 11.4                              | 11.5                           |
| Non-Egyptian <sup>b</sup>                          | 8.4                          | 22.9                              | 19.3                           |
| <b>Religion</b>                                    |                              |                                   |                                |
| Muslim   | 88.8                         | 72.8                              | 75.8                           |
| Christian  | 6.1                          | 19.5                              | 17.0                           |
| Jewish   | 1.0                          | 0.2                               | 0.4                            |
| Atheist or Agnostic                                | 3.1                          | 7.0                               | 6.2                            |
| Other  | 1.0                          | 0.5                               | 0.6                            |
| <b>Age: Mean (SD)</b>                              | 20.48 (2.59)                 | 22.12 (3.24)                      | 21.81 (5.65)                   |
| <b>High-school location</b>                        |                              |                                   |                                |
| Cairo  | 60.6                         | 65.7                              | 64.7                           |
| Alexandria   | 5.1                          | 2.6                               | 3.1                            |
| Another governorate in Egypt                       | 19.2                         | 5.5                               | 8.1                            |
| Another Country                                    | 15.2                         | 26.1                              | 24.0                           |
| <b>High-school diploma type</b>                    |                              |                                   |                                |
| American high-school diploma                       | 18.8                         | 35.9                              | 32.6                           |
| Egyptian Public Education System                   | 44.8                         | 30.9                              | 33.6                           |
| French Baccalaureate                               | 2.1                          | 1.7                               | 1.8                            |
| German Abitur                                      | 1.0                          | 3.0                               | 2.6                            |
| IGCSE/GCSE/GCE                                     | 29.2                         | 24.5                              | 25.4                           |
| International Baccalaureate                        | 4.2                          | 4.0                               | 4.0                            |
| <b>Language spoken while socializing</b>           |                              |                                   |                                |
| Arabic   | 42.9                         | 33.2                              | 35                             |
| English  | 13.3                         | 27.6                              | 24.9                           |
| Both Arabic and English equally                    | 43.9                         | 38.5                              | 39.5                           |
| Other  | 0.0                          | 0.7                               | 0.6                            |
| <b>GPA: Mean (SD)</b>                              | 3.34 (0.47)                  | 3.23 (0.59)                       | 3.26 (0.57)                    |

<sup>a</sup> These Egyptian participants also had a second or third nationality, typically from USA, European nations, or Arab nations.  
<sup>b</sup> Non-Egyptian participants had nationalities primarily in North America, Europe, and Arab nations.

**Affiliation with university.** The Organizational Identification Questionnaire (OIQ; Cheney, 1982) was used to measure students' sense of connection to the

university. The scale consists of 25 items that assesses three components of organizational affiliation: a) sense of solidarity, emotional attachment, and pride; b) loyalty and support for the organization's mission, and c) perceived similarity and shared characteristics with the values and goals of people in the organization. Because the scale was developed for organizational settings, some items were modified to fit an academic setting. For example, the item "I am glad I chose to work for (company name) rather than another company" was modified to "I am glad I chose to study at (university name) rather than another university." Items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale with a total possible score range of 25-125. High scores indicated a higher sense of pride and commitment to the university. Cronbach's alpha for this study was .89.

**Civic responsibility.** The Self-Efficacy Toward Service Scale (SETSS; Weber, Weber, Sleeper, & Schneider, 2004) was used to determine attitudes towards civic responsibility and civic self-efficacy. This scale consists of 11 items and it assesses whether participants believe they should and can impact their community. A high score indicates that they believe this to be true. Items were rated on a 5-point Likert scale with a total possible score range of 11-55. An example item is: "I should volunteer my time to support my community." Cronbach's alpha for this study was .92.

**Psychological Well-being.** Self-reported levels of depression, anxiety and stress were measured using the 21-item short version of the Depression Anxiety Stress Scales, which was developed for non-clinical samples (DASS 21; Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995). This measure has been validated for use with Arab populations (Taouk, Lovibond, & Laube, 2001). Participants rated how much statements applied to them over the past week with 0 = "did not apply to me at all" to 3 = "applied to me very much, or most of the time." These included statements such as "I felt that I had nothing to look forward to," "I felt I was close to panic," and "I tended to over-react to situations." There are three subscales (Depression, Anxiety and Stress) with 7 items per subscale. Each subscale is scored separately by adding up its items and multiplying by 2. The total possible score range for each subscale is 0-42. Cronbach's alpha for the subscales were: Depression = .86, Anxiety = .83, and Stress = .87.

### Procedures

Data was collected from a diverse student body including international students and Egyptians who have lived in other countries. The primary language of instruction at the university is English. The campus has a student body of approximately 5,500 degree seeking students. Convenience sampling was used to target

undergraduate and graduate students at the university. A Web-based informed consent form and questionnaire packet written in English was posted online and its paper-based equivalent was distributed on campus. To encourage students to complete the Web-based version, announcements were posted on university student listservs. They were also sent to all university faculty to encourage their students to complete the study, and a Facebook advertisement was purchased that targeted members of the university's network (i.e., anyone who mentioned the university in their educational profile).

To identify students who were engaged in voluntary community service, respondents were asked to select the different types of campus clubs and organizations (if any) they had membership in. This included: Student Union, academic, cultural, athletic, geographical/ethnic, conferences and community service clubs. Those who selected membership in "community outreach and community service" clubs were classified for the purpose of this study as being civically engaged. Another question on the survey asked students to estimate the number of hours per month that they engaged in community outreach or service outside of the university, whether through these clubs or other extra-curricular activities unaffiliated with the university. The mean score for those who were members of community service clubs was 15.7 hours monthly, whereas students who were not members of such clubs reported significantly less involvement in community work, at 4.7 hours monthly [ $t(507) = -6.47, p < .001$ ]. This question validated the use of self-reported community service club membership as a way to distinguish between those who were and were not engaged in community service, and further indicated that the main method of voluntary community engagement for students was through on-campus community service clubs.

There were 14 community service clubs at the time of this study, initiated and maintained by students. Apart from receiving university funding, these clubs operate relatively independently of the university faculty, staff and administration. Each club establishes its own leadership board and recruits members. Each of the clubs targets a certain community or group of people in need, such as people living in poor neighborhoods and slum areas, children with disabilities, cancer patients, orphans, the elderly or refugees. The majority of the clubs are involved in community development, particularly economic and educational development such as offering micro-loans and teaching literacy and computer skills for vocational enhancement. Another type of activity conducted by some clubs is to host events for the people they serve, such as funding

wedding ceremonies for orphans and designing celebratory events for cancer patients and the elderly. These clubs also raise funds and collect material donations for those in more urgent need. Most of the clubs work in close contact with established nongovernmental organizations (NGO's) in Egypt, providing these organizations with active, motivated and committed volunteers.

**Results**

**Characteristics of Student Volunteers**

Chi square analyses were conducted to identify characteristics of community service volunteers. There was a higher proportion of women than men among student volunteers [ $\chi^2(1) = 6.96, p = 0.008$ ]. Egyptian nationals were more likely to be civically engaged than students with a dual nationality or non-Egyptians [ $\chi^2(2) = 14.628, p = 0.001$ ]. Students involved in community service were also more likely to be Muslim than other religions [ $\chi^2(1) = 11.08, p = 0.001$ ]. Although the largest portion of both student volunteers (60.6%) and non volunteers (65.7%) graduated from a high-school located in Cairo, volunteers were more likely to have completed high-school in rural governorates (19.2%) than non volunteers (5.5%) [ $\chi^2(2) = 22.77, p < 0.001$ ]. Further, student volunteers were more likely to hold a high-school degree from the Egyptian public school system compared to other high-school degree programs [ $\chi^2(2) = 11.58, p = 0.003$ ]. Finally, students who were civically engaged were more likely to speak mostly Arabic or both Arabic and English than mostly English [ $\chi^2(2) = 9.21, p = 0.003$ ]. A two-tailed independent samples t-test found civically engaged students to be more religious than non-civically engaged [ $t(508) = 4.21, p < .001$ ]. Another two-tailed independent samples t-test showed that civically engaged students did not differ from non engaged with respect to self reported grade point average (G.P.A.).

**Table 2. Results for Independent Samples T-tests**

| Variable             | Civically Engaged |      | Non Civically Engaged |      | T-test |     |
|----------------------|-------------------|------|-----------------------|------|--------|-----|
|                      | M                 | SD   | M                     | SD   | t      | df  |
| Religiosity          | 6.53              | 1.65 | 5.53                  | 2.19 | 4.21** | 508 |
| Academic Achievement | 3.34              | 0.47 | 3.24                  | 0.59 | 1.605  | 501 |
| Depression           | 0.87              | 0.74 | 0.83                  | 0.72 | 0.491  | 516 |
| Anxiety              | 0.91              | 0.65 | 0.72                  | 0.69 | 2.43*  | 516 |
| Stress               | 1.34              | 0.74 | 1.18                  | 0.79 | 1.890  | 516 |

\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ .

**Relationship between Civic Engagement and Psychological Well-being**

Two-tailed independent samples t-tests were used to compare the psychological well-being of volunteers

versus non-volunteers. Students who were civically engaged reported significantly higher levels of anxiety [ $t(516) = 2.43, p = .02$ ] compared to students who were not civically engaged. Volunteers and non-volunteers did not differ in levels of depression or stress.

**Predictors of Voluntary Civic Engagement**

In an exploratory logistic regression analysis, we examined the combined contribution of gender, G.P.A., religiosity, sense of affiliation to the university, and civic responsibility on student civic engagement. As gender and G.P.A. did not contribute significantly to the model, they were excluded from the final model. Significant independent predictors were religiosity [ $Exp(B) = 1.25, b = .22, Wald \chi^2(1) = 10.88, p = .001$ ], affiliation to the university [ $Exp(B) = 2.16, b = .77, Wald \chi^2(1) = 12.07, p = .001$ ], and civic responsibility [ $Exp(B) = 2.76, b = 1.02, Wald \chi^2(1) = 24.05, p < .001$ ]. The final three predictor model [ $\chi^2 = 64.06(3), p < .001$ ] accounted for 19% of the variance in student civic engagement.

**Table 3. Logistic Regression Predictors of Civic Engagement**

| Variable               | $\beta$ | SE    | Wald  | OR   | 95% CI      | P      |
|------------------------|---------|-------|-------|------|-------------|--------|
| Religiosity            | 0.22    | 0.066 | 10.88 | 1.25 | 1.093-1.418 | 0.001  |
| University affiliation | 0.77    | 0.221 | 12.07 | 2.16 | 1.398-3.326 | 0.001  |
| Civic responsibility   | 1.02    | 0.207 | 24.05 | 2.76 | 1.841-4.147 | < .001 |

Note.  $R^2 = .189$

**Discussion**

The purpose of this study was to examine the characteristics and predictors of students who chose to engage in voluntary community service at a private English-language liberal arts university in Cairo, Egypt. This study contributes to the literature in three main ways. First, it is one of the first studies examining the profile, predictors and impacts of volunteering to come out of the Middle East and thus provides a new cultural perspective to the more Western-dominated literature. Second, it considers the influence of sense of affiliation with the nation/society, as well as the university, on civic engagement, which has not yet been adequately investigated. Third, the study examines the effects of volunteering on psychological well-being in a younger generation, which is lacking in the literature.

**Characteristics and Predictors of Voluntary Community Service**

Similar to research conducted in the U.S. (e.g., Astin & Sax 1998), female gender and higher religiosity were associated with civic engagement. Our results indicate that these predictors for student volunteerism may be consistent across both North American and Egyptian cultures. As expected, higher levels of self-reported civic responsibility served as a significant predictor of

voluntary civic engagement. However, in contrast to studies in the U.S. (e.g., Primavera, 1999; Serow & Dreyden, 1990), academic achievement, as measured by self-reported G.P.A., did not differ between student volunteers and non-volunteers. Further research is needed to examine the linkages between academic performance and student activities, particularly with respect to voluntary community service.

#### **Attachment to Nation and Society**

The findings lead us to draw the conclusion that students who choose to engage in voluntary community service tend to be more deeply rooted in traditional Egyptian culture and society. Compared to students who were not civically engaged, those who were members of community service clubs were more likely to be of Egyptian nationality and to be of the majority Muslim faith. They were more likely to have attended high-school in a rural or less affluent region of Egypt and to have studied under the Egyptian public education system. Furthermore, they were more likely to report higher religiosity and to speak mostly Arabic when socializing.

It has been previously reported that Egyptian youth from rural areas are more likely to volunteer than youth from urban areas (Information and Decision Support Center, 2010). The finding that civically engaged participants were more likely to have attended high-school in rural and less affluent regions of Egypt suggests that volunteers have stronger ties to what it means to be "Egyptian." People living in these areas are often more conservative in cultural practices and tend to idealize Egyptian customs and traditions. In contrast, Egyptians living in the more affluent, urban cities such as Cairo and Alexandria – and who come from higher income families – are more likely to embrace and associate themselves with international culture, including following Western trends in education, language, customs, ideology, fashion and entertainment.

A related finding was that civically engaged students were more likely to have studied in the Egyptian public education system, as opposed to the private foreign/international schools that have gained popularity in recent years. This finding augments the "Egyptianized" profile we found among voluntary civic engagers. It should be noted that only about 30% of the student body at the university where this study was conducted comes from the Egyptian education system. The majority of the students completed high-schools following Western education systems especially the American diploma and British systems. At the university where this study was administered some of the students from rural governorates receive financial

scholarships based on academic merit or financial need, and most of them are educated in the Egyptian public school system. Thus, our results suggest that students involved in voluntary service tend to be less privileged, which contrasts with literature from the U.S. (Marks & Jones, 2004; Serow & Dreyden, 1990). In addition, these results are especially interesting because community service is not a traditional component of the Egyptian public education system or the general Egyptian youth culture (Population Council, 2011). Yet these students were more likely to volunteer than Egyptian students who completed high-schools in other countries or at foreign-language schools located in Cairo that offer international certificates (e.g., American Diploma, International Baccalaureate) in which community service is an integral component of the curriculum. This suggests that cultural ties and ongoing integration in the local society may be more predictive of continued civic engagement than exposure to formal instruction in civic engagement per se.

Additionally, it was not surprising to find that student volunteers had higher scores of religiosity and were more likely to be of Muslim faith. This higher level of religiosity relates to greater integration in Egyptian society because religion is very highly regarded in Egypt, especially by those living in rural or less affluent urban areas. Islam is the religion of the majority and it is deeply embedded in Egyptian culture. It is also integrated in the Egyptian education system both formally through an established religion class and informally through religious teachers and administrators. The connection between religiosity and community service most likely stems from the concept of *sadaqa* ("voluntary charity" in English) which is required and encouraged in the Qur'an. The influence of Islamic ideals on Egyptian culture, and the tendency for the students in our study who are civically engaged to be Muslim and highly religious, is another indication that these volunteers fit a certain Egyptianized profile.

Lastly, participants who were civically engaged were more likely to choose "Arabic" on the item in our questionnaire that asked what language they spoke socially. In Egypt, English is the second language and is a mandatory subject in almost all schools grades K through 12. In some schools the main subjects, including mathematics, science, history etc. are taught in English. This translates into some Egyptians speaking English while socializing. Speaking only English during class time is required at most private international schools located in Egypt. Because tuition at these types of schools is high, students who attend these private schools tend to come from higher income families and, therefore, speaking mostly or only English

while socializing can be an indication of affluence and a proxy for international private school education. Speaking English is also considered to be trendy by youth from a higher socio-economic status (SES). Although the private university where this study was conducted draws most of its student body from the socio-economically elite – the majority of whom are English speakers who studied at international schools – students in our sample who engaged in community service reported preference for the Arabic language when socializing. This again contributes to the profile of civic engagers coming from a more “Egyptianized” background.

### **Sense of Connection to University**

In addition to attachment to the larger Egyptian culture, this study also explored attachment to the university as a potential factor associated with voluntary community service. Affiliation with the university, which was indeed a significant predictor of student volunteerism in this study, may be interpreted as a form of place attachment. Low (1992, p. 165) defines place attachment as “an individual's cognitive or emotional connection to a particular setting or milieu.” It is also seen as “affective ties with the material environment (including) fondness for place because it evokes pride” (Tuan, 1974, p. 93). Having university pride and attachment may enhance motivation to take part in campus activities and be part of a team under the university name. Then, the choice to become a member of a campus community service club as opposed to an athletic or academic club is likely due to the specific student characteristics discussed in this manuscript. The most attractive extra-curricular choice to an “Egyptianized” student may be a club that fulfills the religious ideals of helping people in need while being integrated in the local community and actively generating real social change. However, further research would be needed to explore if attachment and sense of community on campus differentially impacts different types of student activities.

At the university where this study was administered it was found that a high number of students (19.1%) were members of campus community service clubs. Unfortunately, organized, funded community service opportunities in the country are scarce; although the number of NGO's has risen slightly in this past decade it is still far below international averages (World Bank, 2007). This may be one explanation why a mere 2.3% of young people volunteer in Egypt (Population Council, 2011). A comparatively higher percentage of students volunteer at the university where this research was carried out probably not because Egyptian youth outside the university are disinterested or unmotivated,

but perhaps due to the unavailability and/or unawareness of volunteer opportunities. In contrast to most universities in Egypt, this particular university is one that fosters a volunteering attitude by encouraging involvement in and accommodating community service clubs and activities. This supportive environment allows these community service clubs to thrive on campus, increasing awareness of social issues and working to improve the circumstances of those in need.

### **Psychological Well-being**

The final aim of this study was to explore the link between civic engagement and psychological well-being, specifically less depression, anxiety and stress, in younger volunteers. There was no significant difference in levels of depression between student volunteers and non-volunteers. Further research on this age group needs to be conducted in order to confirm these results and also to understand why younger volunteers do not receive this particular benefit. Research has considered the concept of social integration brought about by community service as an explanation for lower depression levels in older volunteers (e.g. Musick & Wilson, 2003; Piliavin & Siegel, 2007). If this is indeed the case, one possibility is that contrary to older adults and the elderly, youth have more opportunities and other outlets where they can establish social connections that will give them sufficient social support.

The findings in this study moreover indicated that civically engaged students reported higher levels of anxiety, but not stress, compared to students who were not involved in voluntary community service. It is worth noting that a large portion of data for this study was collected during the final weeks of the semester and final examination period. It is possible that volunteers, who are involved with time-consuming projects during the semester, might face increased anxiety during examination periods and greater challenge balancing academic success with extracurricular service. This is especially because volunteers in the present study were involved in time-intensive service including initiating, directing, and managing all aspects of their community service organizations from the ground up. This is different from the North-American context in which opportunities for service tend to be institutionalized over time, established formally by the university, or practiced at already-existing youth centers and educational organizations. However, further research is encouraged to explore the relationship between anxiety and stress with voluntary service.



**Strengths and Limitations**

Intensive recruitment methods in this study were successful in producing a large sample, and the sample approximated the religious and national composition of the overall university student body. Women were overrepresented in the sample compared to the actual percentage of female students at the university (53%). However, a higher response rate from women is not unusual in survey research (Wiseman, 2009). Although the study was generally representative of the students attending this particular university, it is in no way representative of the entire Egyptian student population. Being a private university, the majority of students are of a higher SES which is not the case at other Egyptian public universities. Furthermore, this university caters to the transnational culture, and consequently has a higher number of international students and Egyptian students who lived in other countries or attended foreign-language schools than one would find at Egyptian public universities. The results in this study are therefore comparable to the many other transnational private universities located in Egypt and the Middle East but not the public, governmental universities. The diversity of cultural and educational backgrounds of the respondents allowed us to explore factors that would not have been possible at universities with more homogenous student populations. For example, we were able to examine links between civic engagement and location of high-school, type of high-school education, and language spoken. However, further investigations, specifically at public universities and also across different types of universities, are needed to confirm our results. Also, this study used convenience sampling; future studies should aim at using probability sampling to increase representativeness of the student population.

**Implications and Future Research**

With the social and economic challenges facing Egypt and the Middle Eastern region today, promoting social and community development through community service on a national scale can have a significant impact. This study identified a profile of the type of university student who is more likely to choose to volunteer in extra-curricular community service. This information can be useful to community practitioners and NGO's that are seeking to recruit students as volunteers and university alumni as employed staff. Many NGO's working in the region are multinational organizations that tend to seek volunteers and staff from the English-speaking, foreign-educated, socio-economically elite; results from this study indicate that targeting those from more culturally traditional and less privileged backgrounds might be a more effective approach.

At the same time, given the salutary effects of civic engagement on youth development, it will be important to find ways to encourage other students to engage in service. Further investigations should explore the reasons why students who were educated in foreign-language schools were not as likely to be civically engaged. Considering that community service requirements are often interwoven in the curriculums and cultures of schools following the Western education systems, it is surprising that graduates from such schools were not as involved in service after entering university. Based on self-reported hours of engagement in community service, it did not appear that these students were significantly engaged in alternative forms of community service activities.

Further research is needed to confirm the results of this study at other transnational universities, Egyptian public universities, and other universities in the region. Unfortunately, structured youth volunteer opportunities are not common outside of the university environment, and public university missions and policies do not endorse community service. Egyptian public universities often have student populations in the tens or even hundreds of thousands. Therefore they do not have the financial capacity to support formal on-campus clubs and service-learning is rarely integrated in coursework. Efforts should be made to facilitate volunteer opportunities at Egyptian universities; perhaps nonprofit organizations and groups can themselves take the initiative to set up recruitment tables on campuses and to offer training in community practice skills. It would be useful to investigate Egyptian university students' intention to participate if community service opportunities were made available through the university. If the relationship between intention to volunteer and the "Egyptianized" profile found in this study was confirmed at public universities, the potential for social change on a national scale would be momentous. This is because the majority of students studying at public universities fit the profile discussed in this paper. The percentage of students at public universities who would volunteer, if given the chance, would thus be expected to greatly surpass the 19% at the private university where this study was conducted.

On a regional scale, the results of this study would interest the many foreign and international private universities throughout Egypt and the Middle East that could benefit from conducting similar research and, if results are consistent, introducing efforts to target the local students for recruitment to community practice. Globally, it would be interesting to see if specific profiles such as the one found in this study exist in other countries or geographical areas, and to determine

which intrinsic and extrinsic motivators for civic engagement appear to be cross-cultural. In general, targeting students with known characteristics for recruitment is a powerful tool that community practitioners can make more use of. It can provide them with committed volunteer workers who do not drain monetary resources that could otherwise be used to enhance the lives of the people they cater to. The benefits of this relationship are reciprocal as community practitioners gain motivated individuals who are eager and capable of creating social change while volunteers obtain the many positive individual and interpersonal outcomes of engaging in community service.

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